

MARIA BOTCHKAREVA BECOMES SOLDIER BY SPECIAL PERMISSION OF THE CZAR

Jeered at by Her Companions in the Beginning, She at Last, by Faithful Performance of Duty, Wins Their Respect

Notable Russian Woman, Continuing the Enthral-ling Story of Her Career, Reaches the Place Where Big Things Happen

(Copyright, 1919, by Frederick A. Stokes Co.) This story, told by Maria Botchkareva and translated and transcribed by Frederick A. Stokes Company under the title of "Yashka."

THIS STARTS THE STORY In 1917 the announcement of the formation of the Battalion of Death, a woman's fighting unit in the Russian army by Maria Botchkareva thrilled the world and an obscure Russian peasant girl stepped into the international hall of fame. This is her story told by herself. The earlier installments told of her childhood and marriage. Her second husband, a political prisoner, she accompanies to Siberia, but his jealousy at last forced her to leave him and she resolved to join the army and fight for her country.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

I Enlist by the Grace of the Czar NEARLY two months I traveled homeward from Yakutsk, by water, rail and foot. The war was everywhere. The barge on the Lena was filled with recruits. In Irkutsk the uniform was much in evidence, and every now and then a regiment of soldiers would march through the streets on the way to the station, arousing one's martial spirit. My convoy left me upon my arrival there, and I had to appeal to the authorities for funds to continue my journey.

My heart was hammering when I reached Tomsk, after an absence of about six years. Tears dimmed my eyes as I walked the familiar streets. Here, in this two-story house, I had first learned the fickleness of man's love. That was ten years ago, during the Russo-Japanese War, and I was only fifteen years old. There, in that dilapidated little store, where I can see the figure of Nastasia Leontievna bent over the counter, I spent five years of my early youth, waiting on customers, scrubbing floors, cooking, washing and sewing. That long apprenticeship, under the severe eyes of Nastasia Leontievna, served me in good stead in later years. I must admit, the smoking chimney yonder belongs to the house in which I was married, some eight years ago, only to experience at first hand the brutality of man. And here, in this basement, my father and mother have been dwelling for seventeen years.

I swung open the door. My mother was baking bread and did not turn immediately. How old she had grown! How bent her shoulders, how white her hair! She veered her head about and stared at me for a fraction of an instant. A lump rose in my throat, rendering me speechless.

"Mania!" she exclaimed, rushing toward me and locking me in her arms. We wept, kissed each other, and wept again. My mother offered prayers to the Holy Mother and swore that she would never let me leave her side again. The bread was almost burned to charcoal, having been forgotten in the oven in the excitement of my return. Father came in, and he also was greatly aged. He greeted me tenderly, the years having softened the harshness of his nature.

I paid some visits to old friends. Nastasia Leontievna was overjoyed to see me. The sister of Afanasi Botchkarev, my first husband, also welcomed me cordially, in spite of the fact that I had escaped from her brother. She realized well enough how brutal and rough he was. She told me that Afanasi had been called in the first draft, and that it was reported that he was among the first prisoners taken by the Germans. I have never heard of him since.



The ex-Czar—the "Little Father" who made it possible for Botchkareva to enlist



Botchkareva's comrades-in-arms

I rested for about three days. The news from the front was exciting. Great battles were raging. Our soldiers were retreating in some places and advancing in others. I wished for wings to fly to their succor. My heart yearned and ached.

"Do you know what war is?" I asked myself. "It's no woman's job. You must make sure before starting out, Marusia, that you won't disgrace yourself. Are you strong enough in spirit to face all the trials and dangers of this colossal war? Are you strong enough in body to shed blood and endure the privations of war? Are you firm enough at heart to withstand the temptations that will come to you, living among men? Search your soul for an answer of truth and courage."

And I found strength enough in me to answer "yes" to all these questions. I suppressed the hidden longing for Yasha in the depths of my being, and made the fateful decision. I would go to war and fight till death, or, if God preserved me, till the coming of peace. I would defend my country and help these unfortunates on the field of slaughter who had already made their sacrifices for the country.

It was November, 1914. With my heart steeled in the decision I had made, I resolutely approached the headquarters of the Twenty-fifth Reserve Battalion, stationed in Tomsk. Upon entering, a clerk asked me what I wanted.

"To see the commander," I replied. "What for?" he inquired.

"I want to enlist," I said. The man looked at me for a moment and burst out laughing. He called to the other clerks. "Here is a babe who wants to enlist!" he announced jokingly, pointing at me. There followed a general uproar. "Het! ha! ha!" they chorused, forgetting their work for the moment. When the merriment subsided a little I repeated my request to see the commander, and his adjutant came out. He must have been told that a woman had come to enlist, for he addressed me gaily:

"What is your wish?" "I want to enlist in the army, Your Excellency," I answered.

"To enlist, eh? But you are a babe," he laughed. "The regulations do not permit us to enlist women. It is against the law."

I insisted that I wanted to fight and begged to see the commander. The adjutant reported me to the commander, who asked to have me shown in.

With the adjutant laughing behind me, I blushed and became confused when brought before the commander. He rebuked the adjutant and inquired what he could do for me. I repeated that I wanted to enlist and fight for the country.

"It is very noble of you to have such a desire. But women are not allowed in the army," he said. "They are too weak. What could you, for instance, do in the front line? Women are not made for war."

"Your Excellency," I insisted, "God has given me strength and I can defend my country as well as a man. I have asked myself before coming here whether I could endure the life of a soldier and found that I could. Can't you place me in your regiment?" "Golubushka" (Little Dove), the commander declared gently, "how can I help you? It is against the law. I have no authority to enlist a woman even if I wanted to. You can go to the rear, enlist as a Red Cross nurse or in some other auxiliary of the service."

I rejected his proposal. I had heard so many rumors about the women in the rear that I had come to despise them. I therefore reiterated my determination to go to the front as a regular soldier. The commander was deeply impressed by my obstinacy and wanted to help me. He suggested that I send a telegram to the Czar, telling him of my desire to defend the country, of my moral purpose and pray that he grant me the special right to enlist. The commander promised to draw up the telegram himself, with a recommendation of his own, and have it sent from his office. He warned me, however, to consider the matter again, to think of the hardships I would have to bear, of the soldiers' attitude toward me and the universal ridicule that I would provoke. I did not change my mind, though. The telegram was sent at my expense, costing eight rubles, which I obtained from my mother.

When I disclosed to my folk the nature of my visit to the commander of the Twenty-fifth Battalion they burst into tears. My poor mother cried that her Mania must have gone insane, that it was an unheard-of, impossible thing. Whoever knew of a babe going to war? They would allow herself to be buried alive before letting me enlist. My father sustained her. I was their only hope now, they said. They would be forced to starve and go begging without my help. And the house was filled with sobs and wails, the two younger sisters and some neighbors joining in.

My heart was rent in twain. It was a cruel, painful choice that I was called upon to make, a choice between my mother and my country. It cost me so much to steel myself for that new life, and now, when I was seemingly near the goal, my long-suffering mother called upon me to give up this ideal that possessed me, for her sake. I was tormented and agonized by doubt. I realized that I must make a decision quickly and, with a supreme effort and the help of God, I resolved that the call of my country took precedence over the call of my mother.

Some time later a soldier came to the house.

"Is Maria Botchkareva here?" he questioned.

He came from headquarters with the news that a telegram had arrived from the Czar, authorizing the commander to enlist me as a soldier, and that the commander wanted to see me.

My mother did not expect such an answer. She grew frantic. She cursed the Czar with all her might, although she had always revered him as the Little Father. "What kind of a Czar is he?" she cried, "if he takes women to war? He must have lost his senses. Who ever heard of a Czar calling women to arms? Hasn't he enough men? Goodness knows, there are myriads of them in Mother Russia."

She seized the Czar's portrait on the wall, before which she had crossed herself every morning, and tore it to bits, stamping them on the floor, with imprecations and anathemas on her lips. Never again would she pray for him, she declared. "No, never!"

The soldier's message had an opposite effect on me and I was thrown into high spirits. Dressing in my holiday costume, I went to see the commander. Everybody at headquarters seemed to know of the Czar's telegram, smiles greeting me everywhere. The commander congratulated me and read its text in a solemn voice, explaining that it was an extraordinary honor which the august Emperor had conferred on me, and that I make myself worthy of it. I was so happy, so joyous, so transported, it was the most beautiful moment of my life.

The commander called his orderly in and instructed him to obtain a full soldier's outfit for me. I received two complete undergarments made of coarse linen, two pairs of foot-gears, a laundry bag, a pair of boots, one pair of trousers, a belt, a regulation blouse, a pair of epaulets, a cap with the insignia on it, two cartridge pockets and a rifle. My hair was clipped off.

There was an outburst of laughter when I appeared in full military attire, as a regular soldier of the Fourth Company, Fifth Regiment. I was confused and somewhat bewildered, hardly being able to recognize myself. The news of a woman recruit had preceded me at the barracks, and my arrival there precipitated a riot of fun. I was surrounded on all sides by green recruits who stared at me incredulously, but some were not satisfied with mere staring, so rare a novelty was I to them. They wanted to make sure that their eyes were not deceived, so they proceeded to pinch me, jostle me and brush against me.

"Get out, she ain't no babe," remarked one of them.

"Sure, she is," said another, pinching me.

"She'll run like the devil at the first German shot," joked a third, provoking an uproar.

"We'll make it so hot for her that she'll run before even getting to the front," threatened a fourth.

Here the commander of my company interfered, and the boys dispersed. I was granted permission to take my things home before settling permanently at the barracks, and asked to be shown how to salute. On the way home I saluted every uniform in the same manner. Opening the door of the house, I stopped on the threshold. My mother did not recognize me.

"Maria! Leontievna! Botchkareva here!" I asked sharply, in military fashion. Mother took me for some messenger from headquarters, and answered, "No."

I threw myself on her neck. "Holy Mother, save me!" she exclaimed. There were cries and tears which brought my father and little sister to the scene. My mother became hysterical. For the first time I saw my father weep, and again I was urged to come back to my senses and give up this crazy notion to serve in the army. The proprietress of the house

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SUPPLEE-WILLS-JONES Clean Milk

and old Nastasia Leontievna were called in to help dissuade me from my purpose.

"Think what the men will do to a lone woman in their midst," they argued. They will kill you secretly, and nobody will ever find a trace of you. Only the other day they found the body of a woman along the railroad track, thrown out of a troop-train. You always have been such a level-headed girl. What has come over you. And what will become of your parents? They are old and weak, and you are their only hope. They often said that when Marusia came back they would end their lives in peace. Now you are but shortening their days, dragging them to their graves in sorrow."

For a short space of time I vacillated again. The fierce struggle in my bosom between the two elements was resurrected. But I stuck by my decision, remaining deaf to all pleas. Then my mother grew angry and, crying out at the top of her voice, she shouted:

"You are no longer my daughter! You have forfeited your mother's love."

With a heavy heart I left the house for the barracks. The commander of the company did not expect me, and I had to explain to him why I could not pass that night at home. He assigned me to a place in the general bunk, ordering the men not to molest me. On my right and on my left were soldiers, and that first night in the company of men will ever stand out in my memory. I did not close my eyes once during the night.

Ten minutes were given us to dress and wash, tardiness being punished by a rebuke. At the end of the ten minutes the ranks formed and every

friend's hands, ears and foot-rags were inspected. I was in such haste to be on time that I put my trousers on inside out, provoking a veritable storm of hilarity and paroxysms of laughter.

The day began with a prayer for the Czar and country, following which every one of us received the daily allowance of two-and-a-half pounds of bread and a few cubes of sugar from our respective squad commanders. There were four squads to a company. Our breakfast consisted of bread and tea and lasted half an hour.

At the mess I had an opportunity to get acquainted with some of the more sympathetic soldiers. There were ten volunteers in my company, and they were all students. After eating, there was roll-call. When the officer reached my name he read, "Botchkareva," to which I answered, "Aye." We were then taken out for instruction, since the entire regiment had been formed only three days previous. The first rule that the training officer tried to impress upon us was to pay attention, watch his movements and actions. Not all the recruits could do it easily. I prayed God to enlighten me in the study of a soldier's duties.

It was slow work to establish proper relations with the men. The first few days I was such a nuisance to the company commander that he wished me to ask for dismissal. He hinted as much on a couple of occasions, but I continued to mind my own business and never reported the annoyances I endured from the men. Gradually I won their respect and confidence. The small group of volunteers always defended me. As the Russian soldiers call each other by nicknames, one of the first questions put to me by my

friends was what I would like to be called.

"Call me Yashka," I said, and that name stuck to me ever after, saving my life on more than one occasion. There is so much in a name, and "Yashka" was the sort of a name that appealed to the soldiers and always

worked in my favor. In time it became the pet name of the regiment, but not before I had been tested by many additional trials and found to be a comrade, and not a woman, by the men.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

Confidential (Officer Vize-Feldwebel is in Vaux with 137 men)

One reason why the American Troops were able to storm the town of Vaux was the wonderful amount of information our Intelligence Department had learned about it. The Intelligence Officer's report is given complete, together with the first all-American barrage map and a photograph of Vaux after the Americans had captured it—in Everybody's Magazine for March. This is part of the story of the forty days' fighting at Chateau-Thierry written for Everybody's by Maj.-Gen. Omar Bundy, commander of the American Troops.

With this historic narrative of Gen. Bundy's, a symposium on future legislation by eight important members of Congress, "Our Aliens," by George Creel, and a book full of other features, the March Everybody's will soon be off the news-stands. Get your copy today.

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A Word About Cigars

For the past two years the high wages that have been paid to all kinds of labor have caused an abnormal demand for ten-cent and two-for-a-quarter cigars. This demand has brought forth many new and unknown brands, and at the same time it has produced much experimentation and exploitation of new types of tobacco; the use of freak wrappers and mysterious filler blends.

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